

WEEKLY REPORT

June 11, 2008

GOP goes on Energy Offensive: Op/Eds and Media Coverage

Congresswoman Michele Bachmann wrote an op/ed for the Minneapolis Star Tribune explaining how a more appropriate name for a “cap and trade” energy policy would be “tax and spend.” *“As if costs weren't high enough already, now American businesses and users of energy -- nearly everyone -- would have to pay more for the right to use energy. One of the bill's main advocates, Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., estimates the cost of these permits at \$6.7 trillion by 2050. The federal government is estimated to directly receive \$3.32 trillion, with \$3.42 trillion in permits sold by other parties. American consumers will still pay the full \$6.7 trillion tab. The "tax and trade" bill amounts to unilateral economic disarmament. Our economy is right now suffering from a loss of consumer confidence, sky-rocketing gas prices, a sluggish dollar, and rising costs of living. "Tax and trade" is the last thing we need. There is no coherent reason to have to choose between economic growth and environmental protection. It's a false notion that we must conserve our way out of our energy crisis, or pillage the environment. We can grow our economy, improve our energy security and pass on a clean natural heritage to our children. We must reject impoverishing the American people while the economies of other nations grow,”* wrote Bachmann.

Communicator of the Week
Rep. Kevin Brady discusses gas prices on Fox News

“If Congress announced tomorrow that America would take responsibility for 2/3 of what we use, I think we'd see a drop in prices, and the good news is that we have plenty of resources in America, great environmental technology to produce it, but this Congress just seems reluctant and ignores the issue.”

Congressman George Radanovich wrote an op/ed on gas prices that appeared in the Modesto Bee. *“For decades, Americans have displayed ambivalence toward increasing domestic oil production. Our ambivalence has finally caught up to us in the form of record prices, rising costs for food and ailing local economies. My Republican colleagues and I have introduced a set of clear, sensible policies to reduce the cost of energy through domestic production. The “American-Made Energy” package would increase oil and gas production, give incentives to energy technologies, streamline the building of new oil refineries, protect consumers from energy speculation and repeal the unrealistic ethanol mandate. We are reaching a tipping point, at which the American consumers will no longer allow overzealous environmentalism to block development of our energy security... Americans should not be held hostage to foreign governments for our oil supply. Working families should be able to buy gas at a reasonable price, and more of it should come from America. It's time to take advantage of the abundance of American energy and start using it to benefit its rightful owners -- the American people,”* wrote Radanovich.

Congressman Bill Sali wrote an op/ed for the (Nampa) Idaho Press-Tribune on the failure of Congress to address America's energy needs. *“Congress has restricted American crude oil production and exploration on American soil. There are also billions of barrels of oil and trillions of cubic feet of natural gas to be found in the Outer Continental Shelf, but Congress has barred drilling there as well. Did you know that Cuba has invited India, Norway, Spain and China to drill for oil just off the U.S. coast? ...Current conditions are putting many Americans in a real crisis. Many are at the breaking point. But Congress is not taking the steps needed to get those things done. Democrat Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, has admitted that “certainly more supply lowers the price.” Unfortunately, beyond making that statement, she has done nothing to boost supply. Unfortunately, she and her colleagues have consistently opposed the real solution to ending reliance on foreign oil by increasing production of American crude oil. Congress must not, in some sad tribute to the cramped ideology of an extreme agenda, fail to allow the use of the resources we possess within our borders and within our technological and economic grasp. America needs a sound energy policy that Speaker Pelosi and her "plan" have failed to provide,”* wrote Sali.

“One Minute” Participation

From June 3 thru June 9, 19 RSC Members delivered one-minute speeches. A massive push was made for Members to discuss raising gas prices and the Republican solution to increase American energy supplies. The following Representatives took to the floor to deliver one-minute speeches on energy: Rep. Pitts; Rep. Foxx; Rep. Wilson; Rep. Price; Rep. Barrett; Rep. Stearns (twice); Rep. Pence; Rep. Poe (twice); Rep. Brady; Rep. Akin; Rep. Conaway; Rep. Neugebauer; Rep. Kingston; Rep. Blackburn; Rep. Fallin; Rep. Schmidt, & Rep. Latta. In addition, Rep. Wilson also spoke on the supplemental bill to fund the troops and FISA. Rep. Poe also spoke about Iran.

In Case You Missed It....



EDITORIAL: Murtha's Money

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"The scandal isn't what's illegal," political commentator Michael Kinsley famously observed. "It's what's legal." By that standard, Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.) and his use of Congressional earmarks amount to a scandal factory.

The latest instance, as Roll Call reported on Monday, is a system whereby Murtha, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, steers hundreds of thousands of dollars in public and private money to a charity in his district that has as its primary mission passing out \$250 checks to high school students in the district — i.e., young voters, potential voters and the children of voters. About 1,200 checks will be passed out this year.

The charity, called the Challenge Program, no doubt serves a worthy purpose — rewarding scholastic performance, community service and school attendance. It's good that local businesses support it, and if the Congressman merely cheered it on — fine. However, several major donors to the charity also happen to be defense contractors that received earmarks sponsored by Murtha and are represented by a lobbying firm, the PMA Group, which has close ties to Murtha.

There's nothing illegal about the arrangement and only a House ethics committee investigation could establish whether it's a violation of House rules, which forbid Members from suggesting that a donor to a favored charity will receive favorable treatment in Congressional matters. There's another not-so-surprising connection between Murtha and entities benefiting from his earmarks. As Roll Call reported last year, every company that got federal funds in the 2007 defense appropriations bill through Murtha's largess also gave him a campaign contribution.

Murtha dispensed \$114.5 million in 40 earmarks and the recipients — through political action committees or employees — donated at least \$100,750 to his re-election campaign. Again, there's no evidence of any illegal quid pro quos. But, as Steve Ellis of Taxpayers for Common Sense put it: "Campaign contributions are the Congressional earmark cover charge. While a contribution doesn't guarantee you an earmark, you won't get one if you don't cut a check, at least in Murtha's case."

Another suspicious pattern unearthed by Roll Call is that a contractor's chances of winning a Murtha earmark seem to improve exponentially if the company hires the PMA Group or KSA Consulting, another Murtha-connected firm, as their lobbyist. Opening an office in Murtha's district, even a lightly manned one that may do little actual work there, also appears to increase the chances of securing that earmark.

Again, there is no evidence of illegality or rule-breaking here. But, as a Republican ethics consultant put it: "It's the smell test — you get an earmark and then you make a contribution to his favorite charity. Whether it's a technical violation of the rules, we don't have enough facts to know."

We submit that there is enough smell emanating from Murtha's earmarking patterns for the new Office of Congressional Ethics to make it one of its first objects of inquiry. The OCE can't investigate past activity, but we're pretty sure that Murtha's behavior won't change in the future.

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